

3:9

CHEAP REPOSITORY. [Number 40.]

ONESIMUS;

OR, THE

RUN-AWAY SERVANT CONVERTED.

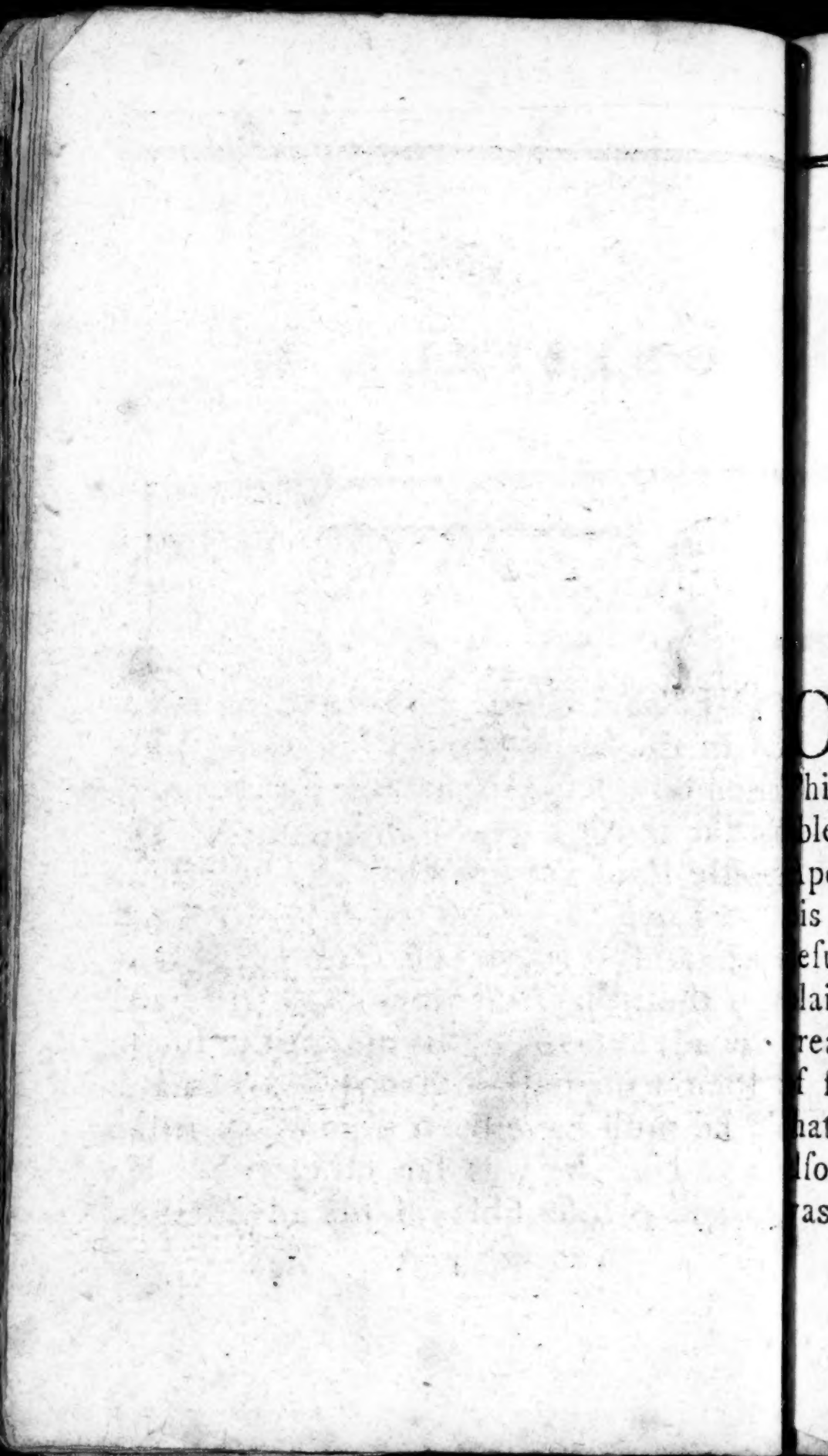
A TRUE STORY.



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ONESIMUS, &c.

ONESIMUS was a servant, or slave, in the house of one Philemon. This Philemon seems to have been remarkable for being a good Christian, for the apostle Paul very particularly mentions his "Love and faith towards the Lord Jesus, and towards all Saints." It is plain then that Onesimus must have had great advantages by living in the house of such a master; and one would think that he must have been a good Christian also. No, he was far otherwise. He was quite insensible of his advantages.

Although there is said to have been "a Church," that is, a collection of worshipping Christians, in Philemon's house, yet Onesimus seems to have been not at all the better for it. He received no doubt the instructions, he attended regularly at the family prayers, he also beheld daily the bright example of Philemon, and yet his heart continued to be hardened. I should think it probable that Onesimus was very blind and ignorant respecting Religion, and also very careless about it, so that all the Spiritual Instruction he received would go in at one ear, as the saying is, and go out at the other. In the mean time, temptations of various kinds would probably come upon him, and thus he would advance from bad to worse, for one sin commonly leads on to another, and at length his heart being dreadfully hardened, he would be ready for almost any wickedness. It seems by St. Paul's account, that he became an unfaithful servant, and actually robbed his master, and that he then ran away (perhaps taking his booty with him, to the great

City of Rome, where it would be easy for Onesimus to conceal himself, just as it is easy for a man who has played the villain some where at a distance in this country, to lie hid in London now.

If the present story were to stop here, where then it might be said, is the use of having all these family prayers and his "Church in the house?" Why the very servants you instruct will still cheat you just as much as if they were not instructed, and it is as well therefore to leave them to go their own way, without trying to make them religious."

I will not stop to reply to this observation here, because, as we go on with the story, the answer will be plain enough.

What I have next to remark of Onesimus, is, that when he got to Rome, he went to hear the Apostle Paul preach. We are not told the reason of his first attending on the Apostle. It is not improbable, however, that some qualm of conscience might put him upon this vi-

fit. Methinks I see him for a few days or weeks rioting in vice, spending freely the handful of plunder which he had carried off, and as his pocket grows low becoming low in spirits also. At length his last shilling is gone. Alas! he has no Christian master to support him, no friend to pity him—and now having first doubted possibly whether to plunge into some new crime in order to relieve his growing distresses, he bethinks himself of what he had once so carelessly heard in Philemon's house, and says within his heart “well, there can be no comfort, no hope, no chance of deliverance for me now, but from the Gospel. I think it is also possible that he might have occasionally overheard the name of Paul mentioned while he was waiting at Philemon's table, and when pricked in his conscience at Rome, Paul therefore is the man to whom he would naturally fly for relief.

Let no master then despair of being an instrument of good to his servants, even though for a time he should see no fruit

of his labors. I am persuaded there has been many footmen, or stable boy, or other servant, both male and female, who has continued thoughtless and profane during the whole time of residence in a religious master's house, and who nevertheless has been struck to the heart afterwards, and has profited materially in the end, by some hint which appeared to have no effect at the time of receiving it.

But we are next to speak of a new scene which presents itself. Onesimus is converted to Christianity under Paul's ministry. The sinner is convicted of his sin. Through God's mercy the Run-away is arrested in his mad and wicked course. The poor guilty wretch of course confesses to Paul his guilt, and through the infinite grace of God in Christ he obtains pardon, and the hope of eternal life

Here then is a striking proof of the rich provision of mercy which there is in the Gospel. A run-away slave and a

thief may become a partaker of it : God can grant even to the vilest and most miserable sinner repentance unto life ; and it is proper therefore, that all should pray to God for a heart to repent, and that no one should despair.

It is plain from many signs that the repentance of Onesimus was sincere. In the first place I think we may take Paul's word that it was so, for Paul would not have spoken so decidedly as he did, if he had not first enquired into the case. No ; I will warrant you Paul examined Onesimus very closely, for Paul's charity did not consist in believing in a good natured way that every one was a Christian who said that he was so ; on the contrary, Paul's Charity led him to be careful and jealous lest he should comfort his flock with a false hope, or should flatter the person of any one. It made him therefore exceedingly particular in examining the state of men's souls : and hence it comes to pass that the words of Paul have so much weight whenever he pronounces any one to be a Christian.

But the sincerity of Onesimus's repentance is still further proved by a circumstance which is distinctly mentioned; I mean by his readiness to take Paul's advice when he bids him go back again to his injured master. Now a false penitent would differ from Onesimus in this particular. A false penitent would make a thousand objections to such a measure. "What," he would say, "must I go back to my master whom I have wronged? I dare not show my face before him, nor before my fellow servants. I shall sink into the earth when I see them. Besides, where is the necessity for returning? I am willing to repent indeed, but may I not repent at Rome? Surely I may be allowed to remain here in my present obscurity, or the disgrace of seeing my master and all my old friends again is more than I can bear, but I will bear anything else; I will live hard and work honestly, and I will be sorry for my sin, and I will continue to attend Paul's teaching. Surely this will suffice."—
But go back again in the first place to

your master, says Paul. Go and own to him what you have done ; away with all this pride and evil shame which is about you. Submit to the disgrace you have brought on yourself, and try to repair the evil you have done as well as you can, by working hard for Philemon in the time to come : endeavour to earn *for* him as much money as you have *stolen from* him, and be not afraid of Philemon's wrath, for I will give you a letter to him. This is the proof I require of your sincerity."

How wise and judicious was this advice of Paul to Onesimus ! " Whom," says he in the letter " I have sent *again*," that is, whom I have sent back again in order that he may confess his whole fault to you, and return into your service. The confession of the sin against Philemon was better in this case than any general confession of faith, or than any plausible tale of Onesimus's conversion ; and so it may be observed in other cases, that a readiness to go *back* at all hazards, and to acknowledge

our crime to the person we have offended, and to repair it as well as we are able, is the first proof of sincerity that should be required; whereas an unwillingness to return implies much remaining pride of heart, a very sinful sort of shame, a disregard to strict honesty, and a fear of consequences that is inconsistent with that faith and trust in God which accompany true repentance.

Onesimus as I have said, consented to return; and let us not suppose that he is now to be pitied on that account, or that any great miseries were in consequence about to fall upon his head. No, let us congratulate him rather on his right resolution, for I will warrant you that after the first affecting scene was over, he would be much the happier for it, and let us remember also, that we are to consider him now as a Christian, who has got among Christian people, and that he departs bearing in his hand that letter of St. Paul to Philemon which I have spoken of, and which forms one of the short Books or Epistles

of the New Testament. How kind, how affectionate, how condescending does every part of this Epistle appear when it is carefully examined! It is a specimen of the Christian spirit, and we shall therefore now turn from Onesimus's character to the contemplation of that of Paul, which we have here a fine opportunity of considering.

Paul was now grown extremely old, and he had suffered much in the cause of the Gospel. He was at this very time a prisoner, and it was while in prison and in bonds that he had preached so effectually to Onesimus. It is likewise remarkable that not only Onesimus the slave, but that Philemon the master also, to whom the letter was addressed, had been converted through Paul's ministry. Thus therefore this venerable Saint was able to write with the authority that belonged to him both as an Apostle, as an old man, and as Philemon's father in Christ, as the father in like manner of Onesimus, and as a chief sufferer, who was soon also to prove a no

ble Martyr, in the cause of their common Saviour.

What then is the ground which he may be supposed to take in order to persuade Philemon to spare the poor converted slave that is sent back to him? The ground he takes is this: He forbears, he says, from that exercise of his authority which such a one as he might use; he hints, in a most affecting manner, how Philemon himself had owed the life of his very soul to the apostle, and he then entreats Philemon, for love's sake, to comply with the earnest request that is made to him, briefly intimating also the worldly profit which Philemon would derive from having now a Christian servant instead of an unbelieving one. But let us quote the apostle's own words—"wherefore," says he, "though I might be bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet, for love's sake, I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ; I beseech thee for my son

Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds, which in times past was to thee unprofitable, but now is profitable to thee and to me, whom I have sent again, thou therefore receive him that is mine own bowels." And then he adds, "Thou therefore receive him not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, especially to me, but how much more unto thee both in the flesh and in the Lord."

What an astonishing difference does Christianity make in men! What a kind spirit do we here trace! How strange also must all this love and condescension seem to some people! A man of the world, whose servant had robbed him and run away, would never believe Christianity could convert the man, and would disdain to receive such a kind of letter as I have described. I am persuaded also my readers will agree, that a worldly correspondent, though naturally ever so humane, would be very far from writing such a kind of letter as this; and certainly an unrepenting and

worldly minded slave would ill deserve to have it written.—But how affectionately does the apostle still proceed—“If,” says Paul, “thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it. Albeit, I do not say to thee how thou owest to me thine own self besides.”

And now let it be remarked, what a happy influence had Christianity on the whole condition of this poor wretched Run-away. He was sinking, no doubt, into the lowest infamy as well as poverty and woe when he first waited on Paul; he was living, I dare say, among the dregs of the people at Rome; and if he had remained unconverted, if either he had not gone to Paul, or if having gone to him he had again hardened his heart, and returned to his former wickedness, he would probably have ended his days on the Crucifix or Gibbet, or at least he would have soon

perished through want, unknown and unregarded, for he would have been swept away among the thousands whom the vice and wickedness of every great City are continually sending to an untimely grave: A guilty conscience also would have haunted him in his last hours, and after death he must have stood before an offended God, and at last he must have had his portion in that place where "there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

How happy then I say, how transporting was the change; The pride of his heart being first subdued through that blessed Gospel which was made known to him, he returns to his master. This was a great step. He returns to slavery indeed, but to a slavery no doubt that was extremely mild, and that scarcely deserved the name; for he is immediately received as a brother into the family from whence he had fled as a Culprit, and the same Epistle of Paul which introduced him to Philemon, would now recommend him no doubt to many

members of the Church at Colossus, with whom he would become united in the bonds of Christian love. Nay, if we believe the report of history, his good conduct as a slave soon afterwards gained him his liberty, and he even rose, as some have supposed, though of this there may be a certain degree of doubt, to the situation of a Minister or Teacher in the infant Christian Church.

But whatever his condition may have been during the remainder of his days on earth, and it is indeed comparatively of little moment, of this at least we are sure, that his everlasting happiness was secured, and that he is now numbered among the company of those "who have washed their garments, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;" whose offences in this life are pardoned through the merits of Christ, and who are "standing before the throne of God." There the great apostle Paul, and his excellent friend Philemon, and here also the converted slave Onesimus, unite with one voice in that triumphant

song, God grant that each of us may one day join in it, "Unto Him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us Kings and Priests unto God and his Father, unto Him be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

An APPLICATION of the above Story

To the Case of those unhappy Men and Women, who, like Onesimus, have left their Home, and have got into a bad Way of Life.

THE story, which we have related, may be useful to persons of every class, or there is a very particular application of it which may be made to those who, in some measure, resemble the run-away and unconverted Onesimus.

I mean now, therefore, to address myself to those who, through some false step in life, and perhaps by adding one piece of misconduct to another, have fallen into any very distressful and disgraceful circumstances. I address myself more especially to those unhappy women, who, like Onesimus, have run away from their proper home, where perhaps they may have heard

something of the Gospel, though they did not attend to it, and who are now ruined in their character, who are also plunged by their growing necessities into a life of open and allowed sin, and are perishing both as to body and soul, either in our great towns, or among the dregs of the people of our metropolis.

I would entreat such persons to consider a little the case of this poor Onesimus, at the time he was plunged, as I have supposed him to have been, in the debaucheries of Rome, and when he must be viewed as a run-away, and even a thief and a vagabond. Methinks he resembled, in a few leading particulars, what some of you may be at present. Now it happened that Onesimus went one day to hear Paul preach. What if you were for once in your lives to do the same? I mean, what if you were to go and hear the preaching of some faithful and zealous Minister of Christ, some follower of Paul the Apostle? I would advise you, if you think of doing it at all to go on the very next

Sabbath. Onesimus, by hearing Paul preach, was delivered out of all his troubles, for he was effectually converted to Christianity; and who knows whether if you pursue the same means, it may not please God to save you, both body and soul, in the same manner. Indeed, I can hardly imagine any other way than that which Onesimus actually took, by which he could have been recovered; and, depend upon it, if ever you escape, and are restored to peace, to happiness, and to society, it must be by the same mighty power of the Gospel. Would to God, that some unhappy creature, who reads this tale, and who has imitated Onesimus in his wanderings, might imitate him also in his repentance. Would to God that some lost sheep might thus be brought back to the fold of Christ. Would to God, that some Prodigal Son, for instance, might be persuaded, like the Prodigal in the Gospel, to repent and return to his father's house; or that some woman, who is a sinner, while she is reading this tale, might find her eyes begin to

stream with tears, like the Magdalen who wept so plentifully at the feet of our Saviour, and might, like her, attain to a comfortable and well-grounded hope, that "her sins, which are many," are forgiven her.

"But what can we do," methinks I hear a whole multitude of such persons reply, "We long to be restored to all the comforts you speak of; we are charmed at the very mention of such happiness, but we know not how to gain possession of it." I answer, do then, in all respects like Onesimus. Take example, as far as your case will allow, from all the various circumstances which may be supposed to have belonged to his tale. First of all, he attended Paul's preaching, after which, I suppose he called on the Apostle, and told him his story. The Apostle, indeed, was a poor man himself, and a prisoner all the while, so that a little good advice, which however is a very valuable thing, was all that could be got from him; except indeed, that Paul being acquainted with

number of good Christians, among whom there might be some rich ones also. He was able to give Onesimus a letter of Introduction, if he thought proper. The same thing, perhaps, may happen now. If you will call on some Minister of the Gospel, after having for a while attended his preaching, provided he judges you to be truly penitent, he will be induced, perhaps, if poor himself, to give you a recommendation to some Christian friend of his, to some capital house keeper, like Philemon.

But shall I tell you what will be his difficulty? A suspicion will immediately arise about your sincerity, and the removal of this suspicion is the great thing which you must aim at. Onesimus succeeded in removing this suspicion from the mind of Paul; for, if he had not, I was sure Paul would never have written such a letter as he did to Philemon.

Let me, then, close with a little advice as to this point, I mean, as to the

manner in which you must give proof of your sincerity.

First, when you confess your faults to any one of whom you ask help, do not confess them by halves. I have known some persons acknowledge a few things which they have done wrong, and which indeed, they could not hide, while they have been mightily reserved upon other points. They have left out half their story. They have thought, perhaps, to spare themselves thereby, but, in fact it has commonly proved, that what was concealed was afterwards discovered and they have been rejected, not at all on account of any unwillingness to help them, though hitherto ever so wicked but on account of it's continuing still to be impossible to put any trust in them. Onesimus, I warrant you, confessed his whole sin to Paul, and was not detected afterwards in any little reservations or excuses, or false colourings.

Again, draw nearer and nearer to Religion. Read the Scriptures. Avoid

company. Attend diligently on the teaching of the Gospel; and endeavour to make acquaintance with those who attend also, and who, however poor, are religious. Onesimus had become one of the little society of the "Saints which were at Rome," at the time when Paul wrote so confidently of his sincerity.

Again, put away your pride and false shame: very forlorn and wicked people are often very proud, and this pride works in a thousand ways, so as to hinder their deliverance. Onesimus submitted to go back to his old master, notwithstanding all the shame that attended his return; and you must shew something of the same temper, if you expect any one who understands the human heart, so as all Christians do, to put confidence in your sincerity.

Again, put your trust in God. Dare to fulfill your present duty; and do not be so much about consequences. God sees all events, and he has likewise all parts in his hand: and he can and will make

a way for your escape, as he did for that of Onesimus, if you resolve fully to serve him, and put your trust in him.

Again, determine on a life of industry ; for all idleness in you must be dishonesty. Onesimus went and worked even as a slave. I hope you have no objection to go and work any where as servant. and to accept even the lowest service. I hope too you desire to be very diligent and profitable servant. " Onesimus," as St Paul observes, " has been once unprofitable, but was now profitable," He became a most valuable hard working man when he became a Christian.

But, above all things, take care to be what you wish to appear ; take care, I mean, to be a most sincere and true penitent. It is a small matter to seem sincere in the sight of your fellow creatures, when you are not so in the sight of God. The heart is deceitful. Enter therefore, deeply into this matter. Consider your own weakness in times past

from temptation; be often on your knees also confessing your sins, and saying to God to strengthen you by his Holy Spirit; pray to him, in short, "to search and try you, to prove you, and examine your ways, to look well if there be any way of wickedness in you, and lead you in the way everlasting."

And now, are you still out of spirits and desponding? Do you still think there is no friend to pity you, no help for you, and that no minister, if you would go to him, will take notice of your trouble? I will add another hint on this subject. When Onesimus first went to Paul, I dare say he little expected to get such a kind letter as he obtained. Shall I then explain to you what was the cause which made Paul condescend so readily to this poor, repenting sinner. It was this. Paul was once a great sinner himself; he could remember a time, when though he never was a thief or a runaway, yet he was a hinderer of the Gospel, and even a persecutor also. But he had obtained mercy. And now it

became the happiness of his life to tell the grace of Jesus Christ. "Unto me," said he, who am less than the least of Saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles, the unfathomable riches of Christ." He thought the greatest honour in the world to be allowed to publish among the vilest Gentiles, the salvation of the blessed Jesus. So it is also now. The very best men on earth, whether Christian Ministers or Christian People, like Paul, owe all their mercy, and they long therefore to commend you to the same mercy, and stretch out their hand for your relief.

Learn, then, to understand the true hindrance to your recovery. It is not that there are no Christians who will help you. It is not that there are no means of deliverance for you, for we have shewn you that "if there is a will, there is a way." It is not that you were driven into sin by any irresistible force, for God is above fate, and God drives man into sin. It is, in short, your own fault, and your own fault alone.

e, then, immediately. Give no sleep
 your eyes, nor slumber to your eye-
 , till you have taken some step to-
 rds your recovery. Remember, in
 rt, that if Onesimus escaped, so may
 : and that if you use not the same
 ans, this very story of Onesimus will
 day rise up in judgment against you.

T H E E N D.

THE
OLD MAN, HIS CHILDREN
AND THE
BUNDLE OF STICKS.
A FABLE.

A GOOD Old Man, no matter wh
Whether in York or Lancashire,
Or on a hill or in a dale,
It cannot much concern the tale;
Had children very much like other
Compos'd of sisters and of brothers;
In life he had not much to give,
Save his example how to live;
His luck was what his neighbours ha
For some were good and some were

When of their father death bereft them,
 His good advice was all he left them.
 His good Old Man who long had lain,
 Distressed with disease and pain;
 With difficulty drew his breath,
 And felt the sure approach of death,
 He still had liv'd an honest life,
 And to his neighbour and his wife;
 His practice good, his faith was sound,
 He built his hope on Scripture ground;
 And knowing life hangs on a breath,
 He always liv'd prepar'd for death.
 He trusted God, nor fear'd to die,
 May it be thus with you and I !
 Or let us hope to die content,
 Unless our life be wisely spent.
 He call'd his children round his bed,
 And with a feeble voice he said :
 Alas ! alas ! my children dear,
 Well perceive my end is near ;
 I suffer much, but kiss the rod,
 And bow me to the will of God.
 I am now from you I'm quite remov'd,
 From you whom always I have lov'd ;
 I wish to give you all my blessing,
 And leave you with a useful lesson ;
 That when I've left this world of care,
 Each may his testimony bear,

How much my latest thoughts incline
 To prove me tender, good, and kind
 Observe that faggot on the ground,
 With twisted hazel firmly bound ;”

The children turn'd their eyes to
 way,

And view'd the faggot as it lay ;
 But wonder'd what their father meant
 Who thus expounded his intent.

“ I wish that all of you would take it
 And try if any one can break it.”

Obedient to the good old Man,
 They all to try their strength began ;
 Now boy, now girl, now he, now she
 Apply'd the faggot to their knee ;
 They tugg'd and strain'd, and tr
 again,

But still they tugg'd and try'd in vain
 In vain their strength and skill exerted
 The faggot ev'ry effort thwarted.

And when their labour vain they found
 They threw the faggot on the ground

Again the good old man proceeded
 To give th' instruction which they
 needed ;

intwist," says he, " the hazel bind,
 let the faggot be disjoin'd."
 in stick by stick, and twig by twig,
 little children and the big,
 owing the words their father spoke,
 in sprig and spray they quickly broke:
 "here father!" all began to cry,
 "we broken mine! and I, and I."

replied the Sire, "'twas my intent,
 family to represent;
 "e you are join'd in friendship's
 throng,
 dearest children, you'll be strong;
 if by quarrel and dispute,
 undermine affections's root,
 thus the strength'ning cord divide,
 will my children ill betide:
 beasts of prey in bands unite,
 kindly for each other fight;
 shall not christian children be,
 d in sweet links of amity?
 erate, you'll each be weak,
 like a single stick will break;
 if you're firm, and true and hearty,
 world with all its spite can't part
 ye."

The father having clos'd his lesson,
 Proceeded to pronounce his blessing:
 Embrac'd them all, then pray'd and
 sigh'd,
 Look'd up, then dropp'd his head—
 and dy'd.

And thus, my countrymen, shew
 And I, and all, be firm and true;
 If christian faith and love combine
 And sweet affection's cords intwine
 We need encourage no dejection,
 Secure in the DIVINE PROTECTION
 In prosperous days we'll blest our God
 And when he smites we'll kiss the rod

